

Sophie's Voice? Dark Intertexts of *The BFG*¹

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ABSTRACT

This article locates Spielberg's adaptation of *The BFG* in a growing corpus of children's Holocaust films. Omissions and additions, that reflect the filmmaker's practice generally, render Dahl's nonsensical whimsy deeply challenging. Drawing on psychoanalysis, this interpretation exposes dark intertexts that point to the Holocaust as a cultural trauma that continues to haunt creative works. As the director of *Schindler's List* and creator of the USC Shoah Foundation, Spielberg has already proven his knowledge of and growing interest in the historiography of the Holocaust. However, while auteurist assumptions underpin the argument, it also looks beyond Spielberg's filmography to demonstrate how *The BFG* draws on memory, folklore, literature and a history of filmmaking and interpretation. These entanglements, intertexts, and associations are neither necessarily all conscious choices nor recognised by the audience. Instead, they rest within the narrative, creating a tone which challenges that of the family adventure film. This reading of *The BFG*, rewritten with an interpretive master code that concerns modernity's 'gravest moment,' perhaps helps explain the film's otherwise surprisingly poor box office receipts.

KEYWORDS

Holocaust Film; Shoah; Spielberg; Film Criticism; Jewish Studies; Popular Culture

‘The Holocaust is a burdening and luminous scar on our very being.’ – Elie Wiesel²

Introduction

The title card of Steven Spielberg’s adaptation emphatically states ‘Roald Dahl’s *The BFG*’ (USA/India, 2016).³ Art direction and cinematography follow Quentin Blake’s illustrations for the children’s novel, respecting demands for fidelity, as does the plot. Yet it equally demonstrates the director’s sensibility, informed by and expressed in encyclopedic knowledge of film history and influenced by ethnicity that his public persona had previously downplayed but for the last quarter century has embraced and proclaimed.

Spielberg’s family adventure asks – and potentially delivers – more than Dahl’s book. Omissions and additions render it deeply challenging. While Spielberg’s adaptations and historical dramas are frequently accused of ‘dumbing down,’⁴ *The BFG* exemplifies ‘adaptation by addition.’⁵ Far from rehashing the novel with ‘its edges cut off,’⁶ as one prominent review contends, it complements, darkens – and makes disturbingly specific, according to a systematic coding – serious implications at the heart of Dahl’s nonsensical whimsy.

In short, the film is another in the growing corpus of Holocaust movies. Textual explication supported by evidence from Spielberg’s practice elsewhere demonstrates those meanings. Their recognition nevertheless

demands what Jameson terms metacommentary, 'according to which our object of study is less the text itself' – neither the film alone, nor the novel, nor the adaptation process – 'than the interpretations through which we attempt to confront and to appropriate it. Interpretation is here ... an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretive master code.'⁷

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In Dahl's novel a giant steals Sophie from an orphanage and takes her to his lair. Afraid of being eaten, she discovers he is benign and subsists on repulsive vegetables: snozzcumpers. From these he brews delicious cordial, frobscottle, in which bubbles fizz downwards, inducing, to his delight, extreme flatulence. He kidnapped Sophie because she witnessed him accidentally when he was out blowing dreams into sleepers' minds. Publicity will attract retribution, he fears – justifiably, for other giants *do* steal children to satisfy greed for flesh.

Sophie witnesses their cruelty. They torment her Big Friendly Giant and pursue her. Sophie, accompanying BFG on a dream catching expedition, snares a trogglehumper – a nightmare. Together they concoct a dream that alerts the Queen to what is happening. BFG and Sophie have breakfast with Her Majesty, who dispatches military forces to capture the evil giants. Sophie's reward is a cottage; BFG's a nearby castle, from which he travels nightly to dispense happy dreams. Sophie persuades BFG to write up their adventures – the book Dahl's reader is concurrently finishing.

Spielberg's filmmaking is perennially self-reflexive and allusive.⁸ This manifests in *The BFG* by elaborating the novel's metafictional qualities. Dahl's BFG has taught himself to read Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*, authorship of which he ascribes in self-referential spoonerism to 'Dahl's Chickens'.⁹ Sophie immortalizes herself as heroine of a tale narrated by another character she has taught to write and spell and encouraged towards authorship. Spielberg thus adapts a publication toying with its own status, form, and provenance, attributed to BFG and Dahl, implied and actual authors, humorously indistinguishable as Dahl's appearance and footwear inspired Blake's drawings.¹⁰ That story was addressed to a real Sophie, Dahl's granddaughter.¹¹ Beyond children, Spielberg's film addresses a secondary audience, adults – commercially necessary for family entertainments – although so unsettlingly perhaps it may account for *The BFG* becoming a box-office 'flop'¹².

Double address is complicated by differential readings available to audiences including both Dahl's readers and those of various ages new to the tale, casual and regular film viewers, Spielberg fans, students of film, Spielberg scholars, those with little knowledge of the Holocaust, those with passing interest and others for whom it defines their personal or professional identities. Rather than plurality – openness to any meaning – postmodern cinematic polysemy employs different, effectively endlessly intersecting, codes, some deliberately incorporated and others, unconscious, more broadly cultural. Hall, writing about how 'a "raw" historical event' is communicable only through 'aural-visual forms' – rule-governed codes and structures – stresses how these reproduce existent discourses, ways of understanding,

each retaining ‘distinctiveness’ and a ‘specific modality’¹³: attitude towards, investment in or belief in the representation. Active reading makes the audience simultaneously ‘source’ and ‘receiver’ of the ‘message.’¹⁴ This renders untenable the idea of ‘preferred’ or ‘dominant’ reading in Hall’s terms – for even if that constituted a faithful rendition of Dahl’s novel who could determine what that might be? – but rather makes any typical (as opposed to ‘oppositional’) reading a ‘negotiated’ one.¹⁵ Our paper embraces Jameson’s spirit: unfearful of aberrant decoding, ‘I would much prefer to endorse the current provocative celebration of strong misreadings over weak ones.’¹⁶

Beyond Spielberg’s explicit treatment of the Holocaust in *Schindler’s List* (USA, 1993), he alluded to it in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (USA, 2000) – developed with the late Stanley Kubrick whose output ‘the Holocaust ... haunts ... like a ghostly specter’¹⁷ and which consciously influenced Spielberg’s productions from the outset; and in *Munich* (France, Canada, USA, 2005) Spielberg interrogated the morality of retribution in a specifically Jewish, post-Holocaust context. His and other filmmakers’ work utilizes and institutionalizes an iconography – acknowledged or implicit; often intentionally, but not necessarily conscious; recognized or overlooked by audiences and critics – that represents almost unthinkable events for which much evidence was destroyed and which public discourse marginalized for years. Such imagery comprises what Jameson and others term ideologemes, whereby sign clusters relay existing but not universal associations. A collective nightmare shapes removed understanding of actual history and trauma, imagining what exists only in cultural memory except for those remaining who were involved. It confirms the worst of what humans are capable of doing or

can be done to them. Thus, while auteurist assumptions underpin our argument, corroborated by other Spielberg movies, this should be understood pragmatically; the evidence is primarily textual.

Kracauer considered filmmaking ‘a collective discipline which accounts for the unity of narrative’ – ‘the perfect integration’ of contributions from numerous personnel¹⁸; ‘teamwork ... suppress[es] individual peculiarities in favor of traits common to many people’¹⁹; and ‘films reflect ... not so much explicit credos as psychological dispositions – those deep layers of collective mentality which extend more or less below the dimension of consciousness.’²⁰ Thereby much is bracketed out, suppressed, ignored, in producing supposed preferred meanings which, naturalized as common sense, retain traces, residues, connotations from codes from which seeming unity emerges. Kracauer, writing of German cinema, insisted ‘the films of a nation are fully understandable only in relation to the actual psychological pattern of this nation.’²¹ We extend that argument beyond Hollywood’s particularities as American cinema to acknowledge the global nature of the enterprise, participants, and audiences.

Unlike Dahl’s linear narrative, wherein Sophie and BFG orchestrate dreams to persuade the Queen to mobilize armies and defeat the enemy, the film comprises dreams-within-dreams, confusing who is dreaming, when, and where. Early on, Sophie literally advances the clock, highlighting the film’s temporal flux that suggests urgency to escape memories, flee circumstances, or realize a desired future: otherwise unmotivated action, not in Dahl’s book, implying Sophie, who speaks the opening and closing voiceovers, is her tale’s

prime mover. Spielberg, then, adds the child-eye view of extermination: Prorokova's first criterion for a children's Holocaust film.²² Sophie looks into a doll's house or, rather, miniature palace, neoclassical with paneled interiors, its bedroom spacious unlike her overcrowded dormitory. The moment anticipates BFG looking into dreamers' bedrooms and, later, Buckingham Palace.

Mise-en-abyme accordingly renders Sophie to playthings what giants are to people. BFG reconfigures human artefacts, in an inverse of *The Borrowers* (Peter Hewitt, UK/USA, 1997; from Norton²³): his buckle is a gate; a telephone kiosk as a kitchen container recalls a tourist tinsplate souvenir; a motorway sign becomes a tray. (That this points to Matlock, location of Gulliver's Kingdom theme park, underlines Spielberg's characteristic detailing to reinforce thematics.²⁴) The other giants' leader, Fleshlumpeater, calls BFG, somewhat smaller, 'the runt'. Those giants treat vehicles – a taxi (containing Sophie) and a garbage truck – and BFG as toys. Size differences furthermore reflect cinemagoers facing magnified projections. Sophie wearing her quilt early on like a coronation train implies she is playacting as the Queen – already the authority she imagines saves her, reinforcing the notion of audiences identifying with stories and characters, and that these dramatize psychic conflicts.

These dreams instate dimensions the book lacks, staging Sophie's desire for alternatives to immediate conditions while alluding to Hollywood as Dream Factory. BFG, who insists he hears 'wondrous and terrible – *terrible* – things', weaves fantasies from fragments captured on location, just as

Spielberg, further interweaving moments from other movies, dreams professionally: the tenor is apparent from how easily academics and journalists harness the metaphor, from Kael reviewing *E.T.* – ‘a dream of a movie’²⁵ – to Schatz on Spielberg’s ‘dream-team’ collaborations.²⁶ The author of the making of *Schindler’s List* recalls Spielberg – whose film self-reflexively highlighted Schindler as ‘Herr Direktor’ – inscribing his copy of *Schindler’s Ark*: ‘I hope this will make your dreams come true.’²⁷

Just as Spielberg utilizes light as medium and metaphor,²⁸ dreams BFG captures figure as darting colored sparkles leaving glowing trails, streaking the image with lens flare. In Dahl’s novel they are, until trapped, ‘absolutely invisible.’²⁹ The book’s opening indicates too that everything is Sophie’s dream, described as illumination, blown in by BFG:

Sophie couldn’t sleep.

A brilliant moonbeam was slanting through a gap in the curtains. It was shining right on to her pillow.

....

It was no good. The moonbeam was like a silver blade slicing through the room on to her face.³⁰

Imagery, restlessness, and shifting focalization – Sophie could hardly perceive moonlight externally as a blade – inscribe not just oneiric uncanniness that Spielberg develops, but co-existing perspectives and interpretations.

More slippages, displacements, reverberations and connections than a paper this length could demonstrate, together with BFG's fluid and unwieldy language that in the film reveals more than the character or original author seemingly intends, point towards repressed meanings. These, as Hunter argues regarding Holocaust themes and imagery in Kubrick's *The Shining* (UK/USA, 1980), demonstrate that 'a heavily authored and arty take on a popular genre ... [can be] seen as being about certain topics rather than passively symptomatic of them.'³¹

Constantly – once acknowledged, excessively – leaking meanings entertainment usually ignores, evades, or represses, *The BFG* is a troubled, indeed troubling, representation of cultural trauma. This manifests through cinematic codes but equally, as in the talking cure, in verbal signs that describe them. It is equally a commercial misjudgment and serious artwork demanding sustained attention. Vacillation between meanings obvious and hidden – more precisely, not consciously seen – creates uncertainty. Viewers taking kids to a children's movie possibly sensed somber meditation and allegory, muddling the tone so much that word of mouth killed it. Explanation is tentatively proffered here through post-Freudian theory. Dreams and verbal slips reveal repressed trauma, but associations, metaphors, and symbols entail logic as much cultural, collective, part of the discourse used to describe such manifestations, as it is individual.

Derrida's foreword to Abraham and Torok's *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* has epigraphs concerning a patients' *inner safe* and *outer safe*.³² Cryptonymy refers to something buried; not dead, but kept alive

and deposited inside without the sufferer's permission or knowing.

Undigested remains of the other are locked inside, or oneself locked away from this matter defensively. '[T]he crypt ... is built by violence,' Derrida insists.³³ Introjection (digestion or absorption) characterizes successful mourning that enlarges and enriches the self, whereas incorporation entails unhealthy lodging inside (rejection or internal expulsion): a still-foreign, still, foreign occupation that survives as a fantasy. Preserving the unbearable within the self symptomizes 'refusal to mourn', denying loss: 'I pretend to keep the dead alive, intact, safe (save) inside me,' Derrida states, 'only in order to refuse ... to love the dead as a living part of me, dead save in me, through the process of introjection, as happens in so-called normal mourning.'³⁴

In Dreams

Dreams, fantasies, and cinema interconnectedly multiply: BFG, obeying Sophie, edits the Queen's dream, played in projected figures on the wall, from fragments in jars with film cans as lids. Enlarged shadows, common in early Hitchcock – another director Spielberg frequently alludes to – also characterize *Pinocchio* (Hamilton Luske and Ben Sharpsteen, USA, 1940); this Spielberg referenced positively in the score for *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (USA, 1977) and negatively, to represent human depravity, in *A.I.*, concerned alike with dreams coming true, as happens for both *Pinocchio* and his maker. BFG's darting dreams resemble Tinkerbell from *Peter Pan* (Wilfred Jackson, Clyde Geronimi, and Hamilton Luske, USA, 1953), fundamental to both *E.T.* (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1982) and *Hook* (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1991). Foregrounded intertextuality acknowledges

major influences, reinforcing a darker side to Spielberg's 'escapism', but also implies meaning is approachable obliquely, by association. As in Hitchcock, good and evil, normality and deviance, respectability and horror blur. Little is what it seems.

Like the disembodied narrator in *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1940; from du Maurier³⁵), who is also the unnamed protagonist repeatedly confused with the deceased eponymous character, Sophie's identity and location remain uncertain and shifting. *Rebecca* – comprising dreams blurred with moonlight-fractured reality – begins with the statement, 'Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again,' raising the question whether that film is a flashback to when she went to Manderley – or portrayal of the dream, otherwise hardly worth mentioning.³⁶ Beyond duplicitous narration, links between *Rebecca* and *The BFG* – which alludes purposefully to other Hitchcock films, unexpectedly perhaps for a twenty-first-century Disney release – include dialogue about dreams in bottles (where BFG stores his), self-reflexivity through the protagonist's husband's home movies, and she, of indeterminate age, being an orphan addressed as 'child'. She says: 'I wish there could be an invention that bottled up the memory like perfume. Then ... I could uncork the bottle and live the memory all over again.' Cinema is that invention – capturing reality, constructing fantasies, or conflating both.

BFG and Sophie hide behind a waterfall from giants, as do Hannay and Pamela from enemy agents in Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps* (UK, 1936), which hints at wider geopolitical conflicts. Sophie's glasses, dropped in the foreground when she is mortally endangered, evoke a ground-level close-up

in *Strangers on a Train* (USA, 1951), confirmed by a fairground wheel in the giants' playground; in Hitchcock's film, they metonymize their owner's murder. Sophie plummeting into Fleshlumpeater's maw, the abyss, references Scotty's trauma-induced nightmares in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (USA, 1958). Before ending thus, Sophie's retrospectively acknowledged dream shows BFG, associated in his lair with steam locomotives, positioned identically to the man with a wheel in another nightmare, realized by Dali, psychoanalyzed in Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (USA, 1945) (Fig. 1). Sophie wards off avian attack during her transportation, echoing Hitchcock's *The Birds* (USA, 1963) which, soon after *Silent Spring*,³⁷ vented unacknowledged anxiety concerning affronts to nature while unintentionally metaphorizing the intervening Cuban Missile Crisis. Curtain rings tear away as Fleshlumpeater cringes from water used to repel him, a close-up alluding to Hitchcock's *Psycho* (USA, 1960) (Fig. 2). That shower murder scene, exploited constructively in *Schindler's List*,³⁸ is profoundly influenced by Hitchcock's work on *German Concentration Camps: Factual Survey* (Sidney Bernstein, UK, 1945-47). Hunter notes how *Psycho* connotes the Holocaust beyond 'murder in a shower', through incidental 'discussion of extermination by poison canister.'³⁹

After Fleshlumpeater visits BFG, Sophie receives a cleansing shower. BFG dries her distressingly close to a furnace. The shower comes from a railway water tower; the blaze fills the firebox of a locomotive upended, like the Wrocław sculpture 'Train to Heaven' (Andrzej Jarodzki, 2010) – associating Giant Country with Poland. A single shot evokes railways that led to 'showers' and crematoria that consumed victims. That one *Schindler's List* review mistakenly recalled a cut from a guttering candle to smoke from the

ovens⁴⁰ – actually locomotive exhaust – confirms metonymy's power. Sophie needs showering after concealment, from her bullying would-be destroyer, inside a snozzcumber. Her slime-covered emergence evokes birth; the shower symbolizes rebirth from innocence to experience. In this reading, indicating the return of the repressed within Sophie's fantasy and the movie overall, the soothing shower simultaneously induces a shudder relating it etymologically to the German *schauer*, an affect prompted by sudden cold rain – a word German sanitation replaced with the softer *dusche*, borrowed from French, *douche*, Rickels observes⁴¹: in this context, hauntingly homophonous with *Deutsch*. (Rickels states anecdotally, having noted horror-movie serial killers' typically German characteristics, that his students misheard *schauer* as 'Shoah.'⁴²)

BFG's malapropism analogously transforms Sophie. Dahl's giant calls her 'a norphan'⁴³; the film's, 'an offerin'.' Originally, 'Holocaust' meant an offering consumed by fire. Spielberg's BFG inhabits a Holocaust narrative focalized through a victim figuring herself as heroine. She may be anticipating, recalling, or fantasizing rescue by an Oskar Schindler or *Kindertransport* instigator Nicholas Winton. Ultimately her fate is uncertain, as in children's Holocaust films generally. Rather than 'conversing with nobody about nothing,' as *Sight and Sound* contended,⁴⁴ the movie establishes dialogue with history, memory (repressed and conscious), folklore, literature, and a rich tradition of filmmaking and interpretation. Spielberg's contemporary American movie establishes a multiple chronotope comprising 1982 Britain, 1940s mainland Europe, a present-day ending in Buckingham Palace, cinema history, and Giant Country, a timeless uncharted place.

Inexorably, Giant Country's population – barbaric, greedy consumers of 'human beans' – represent Nazis. Notwithstanding Dahl's alleged antisemitism,⁴⁵ of which Spielberg claimed ignorance, filmmakers in California might be aware that 'green beans' in Spanish are 'judias verdes,' whereas 'judias' means 'Jews.'⁴⁶ Playfully punning, Dahl probably did not know this. As regards antisemitism, while Spielberg was likely beholden to Dahl's estate to make the film, the author's attitudes, not entirely unknown, gained publicity with its release, coincidental with his 2016 centenary. Intention, beyond our present scope, is answerable with D. H. Lawrence's adage, 'Never trust the artist. Trust the tale.'⁴⁷ Undecidability defines this film's richness, in accordance with Spielberg's practice generally.

Recalling modernity's 'gravest moment,'⁴⁸ unsurprisingly the 'spectre of the Holocaust hovers over this world.'⁴⁹ The idea of it haunting ostensibly unrelated texts is not new, as Holocaust imagery implicitly and explicitly saturates our everyday lives, or rather 'mutated life-world'.⁵⁰ Cesarani maintained, 'the Holocaust has never been so ubiquitous'.⁵¹ Its popular cultural presence ruptures the link between historical events and their 'verbal reformation or deformation.'⁵² Cole's distinction between the Holocaust and 'the myth of the Holocaust' is helpful.⁵³ Despite problematic connotations, 'the myth' describes a multi-faceted enterprise that engendered the Holocaust canon in popular culture. Because 'a "Holocaust film" is *not* the event' but 'a re-presentation ... fidelity is always already a problematic enterprise': most scholars writing about Holocaust films, Kerner observes, look 'beyond the specificity of the historical event,'⁵⁴ as here when we relate *The BFG* to memory, folklore, literature and a history of filmmaking and interpretation.

Mordden, reviewing Spiegelman's *Maus*, considered 'The Holocaust ... so beyond ... what we think of as possible – that its commentators keep dressing it, styling it. ... [I]t cannot be described to normal men and believed, so it must be conjured up artistically, almost invented.'⁵⁵

Children in Holocaust Films

The BFG is a children's Holocaust film. These, beyond the 'innocent child motif',⁵⁶ arguably constitute a distinct sub-genre. Prorokova demonstrates how they primarily involve 'witnessing extermination through the eyes of children.'⁵⁷ Their young protagonists enable investigation of 'conflict between childhood and the adult world.'⁵⁸ Spielberg's film follows this framework: 'children as film heroes are usually the only survivors of big families'⁵⁹, and a 'Gentile with a conscience usually comes to their aid, a non-Jew who bears the risk of saving a Jewish child.' The 'major theme ... is almost always the child's rescue, which becomes the rescuer's salvation'.⁶⁰ Crucially, 'if the children are not saved ... the conclusions tend to be open-ended, along the unwritten lines of "And their fate was unknown" instead of specific closure.'⁶¹ Golan highlights *The Diary of Anne Frank* (George Stevens, USA, 1959) as less 'about the horrors themselves' than an 'optimistic adolescent in a world full of hatred.'⁶² On release, Stevens's film was one of a kind, but perfectly acceptable were films located around the same time and place 'for the entire family', like *The Sound of Music* (Robert Wise, USA, 1965).⁶³ The children in the TV miniseries *Holocaust* (NBC, 1978) Golan describes as the 'seismograph of the period's horror'⁶⁴; but she considers

Schindler's List the film that most fully entangles childhood experience. Its children, 'so enfolded in the story that their depiction does not stand alone,' become inseparable from the adults' narrative: 'the outstanding, unforgettable image ...is the girl in the red coat, alone and lost in the crowd that is as lost as she is.'⁶⁵ *The BFG's* Sophie becomes literally a girl in a red coat, but with her own story, no longer swamped in the adult experience. Spielberg's utterances warrant this interpretation, including, 'I am searching for the souls of all the children who were murdered as a result of what *Schindler's List* is about.'⁶⁶

'I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think.' – Jacques Lacan⁶⁷

Spielberg's version begins in London. Big Ben chimes. An establishing shot – Westminster Bridge traversed by a Routemaster bus, immediately dating the setting⁶⁸ – cranes leftward, introducing the Houses of Parliament. An Austin Mini passes a pub, reinforcing the time of the book's publication. The same year, 1982, Alan J. Pakula adapted (UK/USA) the United States National Book Award for Fiction winner *Sophie's Choice*. Not only does William Styron's protagonist, suffering Auschwitz memories and 'recurring dreams,'⁶⁹ share the name. The book, crammed with allusions to Great American Novels, likewise plays metafictional games. Its narrator, a novelist whose background resembles Styron's, purportedly writes the tale, comprising lurid fantasies and dreams interspersed with meticulous history. Agency is thereby questioned. Choices determining Sophie's miserable fate are forced by circumstances written elsewhere: in the real world, the

commercial market for sensationalist fiction, literary generic expectations, other characters' warped obsessions; by politics, European and American cultural attitudes over three decades previously, unreconstructed sexism in the framing fictional or actual present; all characterized by willful cruelty. Particularly pertinent is Styron's controversial insistence the Holocaust was universalist – anti-human rather than anti-Semitic. His polemic stoked sales, encouraging debate a year after *Holocaust* broached taboo surrounding the events. 1982 also saw Spielberg's *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (USA) – from *The BFG*'s scriptwriter – about another child transported by a fantastic, older, wiser, reciprocal protector; and Keneally's novel *Schindler's Ark*, which Spielberg contracted to film⁷⁰ with the producer of *Sophie's Choice* – an Auschwitz survivor. A precedent that allegorizes innocuous children's material, *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*,⁷¹ about an outsize creature invading domesticity, consuming all the food, and ousting the family, features yet another Sophie. Judith Kerr, who wrote and illustrated that enormously successful book, left Germany the day Hitler attained power. As fellow children's author Michael Rosen insists, 'Judith knows about dangerous people who come to your house and take people away. She was told as a young child that her [Jewish intellectual] father could be grabbed at any moment.'⁷²

Celtic folk music emanates from the pub, connoting continuity and community otherwise absent, and ancient legend consistent with giants and mountainous homelands; later, peering through a tree outside Buckingham Palace, BFG becomes the legendary Green Man, symbolizing life (Fig. 3). In the early hours, Sophie locks up against whatever threat she perceives and collects mail just arrived, which included a magazine, *Majesty*. Letters

generically addressed to 'The Orphanage', together with the odd delivery time, compromise realism. The stamps' values and a briefly glimpsed postmark confirm the early 1980s date. Moreover, Sophie's checking the mail implies eagerness for news. Such was the case with real-life *Kindertransport* survivor Joe Stirling: '[I]n February 1939 a brown envelope arrived from the Jewish Refugee Committee in London.' Joe 'read the letter over and over, excited at the prospect of escape. It became his special treasure.'⁷³ Indeed, Anne Frank confirms fantasy's role in ameliorating anxieties: before hiding, she 'went around for six months at a time pretending I was an orphan.'⁷⁴

Dreams were an acknowledged coping mechanism within concentration camps. Survivor Imre Kertész asserts: 'prison walls cannot impose boundaries on the flights of one's fantasy.'⁷⁵ Simon Wiesenthal's autobiographical novella, *The Sunflower*, repeatedly mentions dreaming and fantasy: one prisoner 'in another world ... imagined things that would probably not happen for years.'⁷⁶ Elsewhere, 'you lost yourself in fantasy merely to escape from the appalling truth', Wiesenthal continues. 'We escaped into dreams and we didn't want to awake,'⁷⁷ 'our whole existence ... was a dream induced by hunger and despair.'⁷⁸

Within the orphanage, light shafts penetrating windows and Sophie's flashlight for reading inscribe the cinematic apparatus frequently figured in Spielberg's films.⁷⁹ They signify cinema as escapism. Rarely, though, does that cliché consider what *from*, *to* or *why*. These projected beams are metonyms: for salvation from the orphanage – a total institution where, Sophie soliloquizes, obedience is key to survival. So, apparently, is illusion: after a

clattering outside leads Sophie to step onto the balcony, she says, 'Never look behind the curtain', almost quoting *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming – another director Spielberg reveres – USA, 1939) in which a traumatized girl fantasizes somewhere, over the rainbow, better than reality, but actually the same place, inhabited by familiar acquaintances. The proscription reminds also of how Hollywood's *The Diary of Anne Frank* emphasizes avoiding the curtain lest movement attract attention.

Externally the orphanage's tower over its entrance and arched sign over the gate evoke the 'Work makes you free' slogan at Auschwitz and other camps. Although *Giant Country* is timeless – BFG began with the world – the film evidences a past unmentioned by Dahl, while other giants' removal presages peace; and, within *Giant Country*, manifestations of wartime: BFG's kitchen bench is an RAF fighter's wing; a fan is an airscrew. The balcony, forbidden to Sophie, recalls *Schindler's List* where Amon Goeth overlooks the camp. Drunken 'louts', as the credits say, stagger noisily through puddles. 'Get outa the water, mate!' they shout, foreshadowing aversion manifested by cruel, stupid giants the same actors play. Sophie positions herself in antipathy, boldly reprimanding them. The scenario imaginarily reverses hegemony, through partial identification with the oppressive other.

Transition from the Mother of Parliaments, cradle of democracy, to boorishness connected with bullying and ultimately nightmarish actions – abducting and eating children – places unequivocally uncivilized behavior on a spectrum. As in *Psycho*, decent society harbors unspeakable depravity. BFG's dark mass looming over the capital, his ability to hide within it, before

recognition as uniquely benevolent, confirm such interpretation. Initially his hooded cloak, evoking the Grim Reaper, recalls a satanic colossus's bat-like wings in 'Night on Bare Mountain' from the same American distributor's earlier release, *Fantasia* (Wilfred Jackson et. al, 1940), whose shadow blackens a German-looking city to render hellfire, allegorizing Nazism. Later, dream-mixing, BFG bottles a cloudlike Fleshlumpeater, which rises with demonic eyes, again like Disney's gargantuan fiend.

Such suggestions point to revelation in *Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, France, 1956) that Auschwitz had an orphanage, constantly replenished. Initial equivocation – whether BFG is threatening, Sophie's savior, or even, as Death personified, an easeful alternative – parallels camp memories' effect on Kertész. An obituary states:

In his work ... he chose a paradox to express his doubts: 'God is Auschwitz, but also He who brought me out of there, who obliged, even compelled me to give an account of all that there happened, because He wants to know and hear what he had done.'⁸⁰

BFG, like Schindler – Nazi, savior, witness and swindler – is an ambiguous personification: 'They takes; I gives back,' BFG insists. His motivation in removing Sophie – self-protectively pre-empting investigation – chimes with Nazi determination to eliminate witnesses to, and evidence of, their Final Solution. BFG, locating Giant Country for British commanders, states: 'You won't be finding it a second time.' Yet he functions against other giants, specifically in relation to Sophie, as a *mensch* – a human (and humane) being.

Abrams glosses this Yiddish word as connoting qualities for emulation: civilized (rather than animalistic) behavior, decency, uprightness, ethics, responsibility, honor, nobility, and kindness.⁸¹ *Menschlikayt*'s 'uniquely Jewish code' implies aspiration towards, or at least identification with, Godliness.⁸² However, BFG, consistently displaying these characteristics, presents no more exclusively Jewish traits than Schindler. Both gentiles manifest gentility, rather, against *goyim naches*, described by Abrams as amalgamated goyish and bodily inclinations including sensuality, drunkenness, sexual licentiousness, impulsiveness, fighting, athleticism, and competitive sport – the idealized Western manliness of muscular Christianity that explicitly excluded European Jews, against which arguably more feminized, intellectual, submissive, ironic, pacifistic, and so on Jewish masculinity developed. The louts Sophie rails against, the other giants, like the Nazis whose plans Schindler subverts, embody *goyim naches* as debasement.

BFG's hand grabs Sophie from her dormitory, recalling the voiceover opening *Rebecca*: 'Moonlight can play odd tricks upon the fancy. A cloud came upon the moon and hovered an instant like a dark hand before a face.' He takes her to Giant Country. Sophie protests, 'there's no such place' – like victims who dismissed 'the final horror,' Keneally notes, as 'dangerous rumor'; nevertheless, 'all the children knew about the gas' and 'grew petulant when you tried to deceive them'.⁸³ Indeed, as early as 9 October 1942, Frank noted of Jews outside, 'The English radio says they're being gassed'.⁸⁴ Sophie scuttles along rafters and hides in drawers and suitcases, recalling how Spiegelman represents Jews in relation to Nazi cats in *Maus*.⁸⁵ She witnesses horrors from windows and vantage points, as in *Schindler's List*,

The Pianist (Roman Polanski, France, Germany, Poland, UK, 2002), *The Reader* (Stephen Daldry, UK/USA, 2008), or *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (Mark Hermann, UK/USA, 2008).

Sophie's first night away is in a ship with a Union Jack pillow, evoking child refugees crossing the sea. Later, Palace staff give her a sailor suit. While British royalty hardly clothe their children fashionably, such costume connotes the past. Parallels exist with *Schindler's List*, one of Spielberg's many child abduction narratives, in which a girl begins in the same outfit: Danka Dresner – who, like Dahl's Sophie, wears round steel glasses – became a survivor. Spielberg's Sophie wears spectacles with rose-tinted frames while fantasizing, seemingly losing them whenever reality intrudes.

BFG reads Sophie a bedtime story from *Nicholas Nickleby*, another eponymous rescue narrative whereby the vivacious, kindly hero saves the ultimately doomed Smike from systematic cruelty and malnourishment. The passage is hardly comforting: 'With throbbing veins and burning skin, eyes wild and heavy, thoughts hurried and disordered, he felt as though the light were a reproach, and shrunk involuntarily from the day as if he were some foul and hideous thing.' BFG reads with a glass fashioned from a ship's porthole, evoking the 'judas hole' Holocaust film motif: 'the peephole or, alternatively a window' (Fig. 4), as aforementioned, 'onto a site of sadistic violence – be it physical abuse, sexual assault or the gas chamber.'⁸⁶

Sophie's experience echoes how inmates selected for work would, Hart-Moxon recalls, 'be covered in green fluid,' then showered, before receiving striped uniforms.⁸⁷ Unlike Dahl's novel, which stresses Sophie is

'still wearing only her nightie,'⁸⁸ following Sophie's shower BFG provides piled-up clothes recalling pyramids of possessions in Auschwitz. She selects a red coat reminiscent of the girl Schindler observes whose fate contrasts with her sailor-suited counterpart's. The 'foulsome snozzcumber' Sophie hides in, analogously to Dresner avoiding extermination by descending into a latrine, leaves her drenched in green gunk, and leads to her wearing a red jacket. Later she reverses it – revealing stripes.

Enemy giants' names echo those that Nazi leaders called each other. Little different from Hitler's sobriquets, 'Carpet Chewer' and 'Wolf', are Bonecruncher, Fleshlumpeater, Bloodbottler, Childchewer, Meatdripper, Maidmasher, Manhugger and Butcherboy. BFG, unlike a 'cannybull', eats snozzcumber, not 'human beans': such distinctions elevate humanity over radical otherness, yet recall the contradiction that Hitler became vegetarian. Dahl's book categorizes BFG: 'Obviously ... not a human. But ... definitely a PERSON'⁸⁹ – a *mensch*, indeed – ambiguity that parallels debates over explanations for Nazism or Schindler's motivation. Initially, however, BFG appears unequivocally threatening, a projected fear, rather as Frank, after repeated break-ins, writes: 'In my imagination, the man I thought was trying to get inside the Secret Annexe had kept growing and growing until he'd become not only a giant but also the cruellest Fascist in the world.'⁹⁰ Kaplan, examining trauma, recalls how Hitler 'assumed in my infant consciousness a kind of monster form.'⁹¹ Wiesenthal calls Hitler's minions 'beasts in human shape,'⁹² accordant with the primitive giants, frightened by rain, drooling in their sleep, and looking to BFG when they 'has a booboo'.

The BFG parallels Golan's case studies revealing the structure of six European children's Holocaust films. Initially, 'non-Jewish rescuers are portrayed as racist boors'; others as 'simply indifferent to Jews, especially if they are "out of sight, out of mind"'.⁹³ Recall London, indifferent to Sophie as BFG snatches her. In the second stage they become, sometimes unwillingly, 'protectors of their children'. Then they 'get to know the children emotionally and cognitively...; through bonds of love and responsibility, they grow so close as to endanger their own lives.'⁹⁴ BFG, Sophie's surrogate father, protects her from other giants. Finally, the saviour, transformed, learns a lesson most likely lost if events had concerned rescue of adults.

Sophie's being a red-coated girl to Hitler's 'wolf' reinforces fairy tales' admonitory function and the flexibility of archetypes to 'explain' or contain, however inadequately, actual events. Reciprocally, actual perpetrators acquired mythic if flat dimensions as villains in a binary them-versus-us, expressed, initially understandably and justifiably, through Allied propaganda – then perpetuated in Cold War movies that, after Germany's partition and the Marshall Plan, displaced fear of communism onto on-screen Nazis.⁹⁵

Moreover, *The BFG* subverts notions of the passive Jew, 'led like a sheep to slaughter'⁹⁶ according to a trope that demonstrates pervasiveness of analogy or allegory. Sophie ultimately figures the defiant Jew triumphing. Before the dream catching, the giants detain BFG and Sophie. Incredulously, she yells, 'Don't just take it, do something!' as BFG is hauled into the air. This torment evokes photographs and testimonies portraying Jews humiliated without resistance, as well as atrocities against infants⁹⁷ too horrific even to

suggest in *Schindler's List*.⁹⁸ Sophie, refusing passivity, escapes. Running through grass, she mirrors Shosanna in *Inglourious Basterds* (Quentin Tarantino, USA, Germany, 2009) – another character who, eventually, wearing a red dress, leads battle against Nazis.

Twice there are cuts to geese flying overhead between houses, an image lacking in Dahl's book. Conventionally connoting freedom – like seagulls that bookend and punctuate Stevens's Anne Frank film – they nevertheless migrate smoothly, in formation rather than ragged, shape-changing skeins as in nature. They figure displacement of droning bombers – from the Third Reich raiding Britain, where in the alternative diegesis children perish nightly, supposedly taken by giants; or from Britain, as Allied planes bomb Germany. Frank refers to 'hundreds', 'swarms of planes' overhead;⁹⁹ Stevens's film shows these, scoring parallel trails across the sky.

BFG pursues dreams through what the novel calls and the film visualizes as 'misty country', an 'ashy-grey' landscape, 'swirling mists and ghostly vapours'¹⁰⁰: literally night and fog. Pantomime occurs as Sophie exclaims 'it's behind you' whilst BFG falls and fumbles in attempting to catch a rare happy 'phizzwizard'. Light-heartedness echoes *Life is Beautiful* (Roberto Benigni, Italy, 1997) in which Guido clowns to protect his son's innocence. BFG, finally learning Sophie's name, labels a jar with it: much as Irena Sendler, who saved more Jews than anyone,¹⁰¹ organized Polish Catholics to foster 2,500 smuggled children whose birth names she buried in jars, intending their families would be reunited.

How dreams are captured, 'like butterflies', further evokes Holocaust iconography. When Sophie, after pupa-like suspension in her quilt, enters the bedroom of BFG's previous protégé, abandoned possessions include framed butterflies. Sophie learns about this lost boy outside a pawnbrokers near the orphanage where BFG explains his super-sensitive ability to hear caterpillars debating which will become beautiful butterflies. *The Pawnbroker* (Sidney Lumet, USA, 1964; from Wallant¹⁰²) – one of America's first Holocaust portrayals – features a survivor robbed of his family, who later loses a surrogate son. That begins with his child's hands, close up, attempting to capture a butterfly at a picnic before soldiers detain the family; toward the end, framed butterflies – killed by gassing – appear in his store. The first jars Sophie sees in *The BFG* are labelled 'butterfly' and 'fire'. Nor can go unheeded *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*: children's art and poetry from Terezin ghetto and camp.¹⁰³ Wiesenthal, furthermore, recalls dreading 'No sunflower would ever bring light into my darkness, and no butterflies would dance above my dreadful tomb.'¹⁰⁴ Kubrick had adapted Nabokov's *Lolita*, in which 'metaphors and descriptions ... evoke the trains, camps, and other details of the Holocaust.'¹⁰⁵ Despite Nabokov, a lepidopterist, dismissing 'symbols and allegories' as 'Freudian voodooism,'¹⁰⁶ he threads butterfly imagery throughout this tale of a girl kidnapped, abused, and rescued by one monster from another.

While dream-blowing, BFG and Sophie visit a family in German territory, indicated by a Volkswagen (mirroring the Mini) and domestic decor. The architecture and canal-side location, with bicycles and a bridge, signify Frank's Amsterdam. A child's toys include ships and planes, suggesting he

too craves escape; transportation peppers the film, whether actual, playthings, or symbolic substitutions, such as BFG using nautical ladders as braces or other giants having tires on their belts. An implanted dream sees this boy bypass his parents (who also receive soothing dreams) in being connected by hotline to the United States President. While Dahl originated this, it resonates with Wiesenthal's death camp remembrance: 'Somebody' claimed 'he had heard on the American radio that Roosevelt has threatened the Germans with reprisals if any more Jews were killed.'¹⁰⁷ Although the boy's wishes are not explicit, BFG ponders, 'I hears lament. Is someone crying for their darling?' as a bell chimes – or, portentously, knells – while the parents breathe deeply, making connection between dreams, death, and inhalation. Such serenity amid ominous intimations parallels fantasies projected onto Frank who, according to one influential, unattributed account, looked 'beautiful' in Auschwitz before dying from typhus in Bergen-Belsen, 'peacefully, feeling that nothing bad was happening to her.'¹⁰⁸ Her book transmogrified Frank from 'victim', buried anonymously, to eternal 'survivor'. Like Sophie fantasizing BFG, Frank personifies her thoughts as Kitty, a projected other – Anne other – her diary, because 'I don't have a friend.'¹⁰⁹ A visitor to the Amsterdam house actually wrote: 'to me she is one of the survivors.'¹¹⁰

Returning to Giant Country is perilous. Fleshlumpeater sets after Sophie his cronies, who sniff, growl, and bare teeth at her dropped quilt. They mirror SS dogs tracking Jews in *Schindler's List*. Destruction ensues, including shelves of jars tipped forward and smashed in a shot identical to when Commandant Goeth later rages at his maid (Fig. 5). Now the giants walk on shattered fragments, evoking *Kristallnacht*, 'the night of broken glass'.

Raiding BFG's home, Fleshlumpeater suspiciously questions, 'Does you have a little pet?' – connoting *Inglourious Basterds* when the 'Jew Hunter', intruding the Dreyfus home, detects 'rats' down below. The giants' 'hunting' evokes the German *Judenjagd*, which meant catching and murdering ghetto escapees.¹¹¹ 'Once us giants we be gentries', implores BFG, appealing to cultured humanity. The reply: 'Those days are over.'

In a human-scale secret annexe, where the previous occupant left a childlike diary, Queen Victoria's portrait inspires Sophie's plan to spur the current monarch into action. Recall Frank's interest in royalty¹¹² and her explicit juxtaposition: 'Yesterday ... was our Führer's fifty-fifth birthday. Today is the eighteenth birthday of Her Royal Highness Princess Elizabeth of York'¹¹³ – subsequently Queen Elizabeth II, who Sophie imagines defeating the giants, accordant with how Frank ruefully reports, 'everyone thinks it's Britain's duty to save Holland, as quickly as possible. What obligations do the British have towards us?'¹¹⁴

In the final act, BFG and Sophie make the Queen waken with concerns about missing children. It begins with BFG editing the dream that motivates subsequent events – possibly *constitutes* them, in that previous scenes supposedly 'real' were dreams, as when Fleshlumpeater eats Sophie before she awakens in bed. There are Spielbergian precedents: *Minority Report's* (USA, 2002) neat resolution may be its protagonist's imagining while incarcerated in suspended animation,¹¹⁵ and David in *A.I.* spends a day with the maternal figure highly evolved robots conjure from his memory as, a voiceover informs, 'he went to that place where dreams are born.'¹¹⁶ During

the dream-blowing Sophie asks, 'BFG, could you hear *my* heart at the orphanage?' His reply, 'Yes, I hears it right now,' confirms she might be – literally – not where she thinks.

The magnificent Royal breakfast – strawberries, cream, and marmalade for Sophie; BFG's industrial sized fry up – is Dahl characteristically celebrating comfort food. Ironically, an antepenultimate entry in Frank's diary, after describing repulsive food,¹¹⁷ concerns a surfeit of previously fantasized treats, repeated in Sophie's breakfast – uniting dreams and containers: 'nothing but strawberries, strawberries, strawberries, and then our supply was either exhausted or in jars.'¹¹⁸ The scene continues with Rabelaisian delight in bodily functions: ingestion, but also BFG spewing gallons of coffee, and flatulence induced by frobscottle in all who partake, including Her Majesty. This again entails hegemonic inversion, signified by bubbles sinking – analogous to 'a nether world of hallucinations' and 'upside-down fantasy' in *Sophie's Choice*¹¹⁹ – just as for BFG dreams emerge beyond an uphill flowing stream, in a topsy-turvy world resembling a reflective lake.

How fantasy sustains hope is poignantly underlined by recipes found in a Terezin bunkhouse:

Cold Stuffed Eggs Pächter: Hard boil 10 eggs, cut them in half. Remove yolks and press them through a sieve. Add 5 decagrams butter, 2 anchovies pressed through a sieve, a little mustard, 3-4 drops Maggi, 1/8 liter whipped heavy cream, parsley, lemon juice. Now put eggs on a platter. Pour aspic over. Before[hand], let fantasy run free and the eggs are garnished

with ham, salmon, caviar, capers. One can put the eggs into paper cuffs and serve them with hot sliced rolls.¹²⁰

As *Night and Fog* comments: 'The deported relives the obsession that dominates both his waking life and dreams: food.' Similarly, Keneally reports workers trapped in Auschwitz 'saying, "You'll see.... We'll end up somewhere warm with Schindler's soup in us".' After eight days, 'when they had been moved to a hut closer to the crematoria and ... did not know if they were to go to the showers or the chambers ... despair wasn't quite the fashion. ... You would still find women huddled in recipe talk and dreams of pre-war kitchens'.¹²¹ In reality, as in *Life is Beautiful*, fantasy alleviates suffering but cannot eradicate it.

While children's Holocaust narratives are 'child-oriented, Prorokova claims, they cannot be dismissed as 'pure children's film'.¹²² They always entail double address. They 'do not represent reality well. The child in the Holocaust film is a character from a fairy tale' required to defeat evil.¹²³ Prorokova employs 'fairy tale', 'fable', 'fantastic', and 'game/play', to describe elements of specific genres these films employ. *The BFG* matches them all and conflates fairy tales with gameplay in which the Holocaust is 'unreal,' suggesting its incomprehensibility, wherein Sophie must convince the Queen to banish the giants. 'Hence, in the minds of children, the persecution and genocide that simply cannot be imagined as part of their everyday reality become a supernatural evil over which good must triumph.'¹²⁴ Feldman writes:

[G]ames in such texts do not induct children into a more mature,

rational grown-up world, but instead serve as a juvenile means of making sense of the madness and cruelty of a brutal adult realm. In addition, play in children's and young adult texts on the Holocaust is not divorced from reality but rather enmeshed in a complex relationship implicating reality and fantasy in tandem.¹²⁵

The game furthermore implicates the spectator, challenging them to recognise intertextuality, or even the Holocaust as intertext. Audiences encounter the childlike perspective of the big screen, watching extermination unfold in the dreamlike unreality of cinema.

Sophie, dreaming she puts everything right, proposes a toast and induces the Royal Household and Chiefs of Staff to drink. When BFG offers the Queen frobscottle, Sophie, attempting to deter him, performs a cutthroat gesture. Seemingly innocuous, this echoes *Schindler's List*, itself alluding to *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, France, 1985), when an Aryan child's identical sign conveys to Jews their destination. 'I believe in the BFG!' Sophie proclaims, echoing the exhortation from *Peter Pan*: 'Clap your hands if you believe in fairies.' Crucially, the sentiment is redundant if BFG exists. The allusion is apt: 'Neverland ... has long been read by critics as a place of death, rendering Peter a sort of spectral apparition who guides children away from their parents to play with him.'¹²⁶ Another intertext is Frank's line, controversially quoted too often without context: 'In spite of everything I still believe that people are truly good at heart.'¹²⁷ In a parallel sense, Sophie's affirmed faith asserts goodness in a representation of the dangerous other. Similarly desperate sentiments color other Holocaust texts, such as *Maus* when, despite Anja's

suicide, Vladék insists, 'we lived happily, happily, happily ever after.'¹²⁸ The repetition undermines Vladék's statement – he doth protest too much.

Another triple abnegation marks a curiously cryptic conversation about BFG's previous ward:

'Was the boy scared?'

'Yeah. In the end.'

'I'm not.'

'Brave Sophie.'

'I'm not. I'm not'

In Giant Country with the army in tow, Sophie becomes the rebellious Jew from *Defiance* (Edward Zwick, USA, 2008) and *Inglourious Basterds*. Defying BFG, she smashes the jar containing the trogglehumper curse, exploding what is essentially a bomb. In Dahl's book, when discussing a giant's brutality, she states, 'I hope he chokes.'¹²⁹ Indeed, as the canister explodes and the 'blob of gas', in Dahl's description, spreads, Spielberg's giants cough and splutter.

The movie banishes them to an island, reversing Hitler's 1930s' scenario for a Madagascan Jewish state. Snozzcumpers rain like bombs, followed by seeds to establish their new austerity economy. Sophie awakens, wearing contemporary pajamas, as a princess in what resembles the doll's house bedroom from the start. The film ends with her voice-over (echoing *Rebecca*): 'I had a dream last night. I was awakened by a beautiful buzzing humming noise floating above my bed.' This ultimate fantasy, wherein Quentin Blake's painting of BFG in Dream Country adorns the wall, frees her

to open the curtain onto her imagination. Giant Country becomes a Promised Land of vegetable gardens and orchards. Yet the smoking chimney above BFG's bunker-like lair, its visible architecture camouflaged, resembles a crematorium (Fig. 6). Surrounding grassland contains yellow flowers – depending on giant or human perspective, sunflowers evoking Wiesenthal's disquisition on forgiveness; or dandelions connoting Auschwitz where Primo Levi slaved for I. G. Farben to synthesize rubber from them.¹³⁰ When she describes how she 'could see the scattered pages of the book [BFG] was writing', cylindrical containers and scrolled paper resemble Zyklon B canisters (Fig. 7). Reality intrudes insistently, through 'hesitations' and 'stammers',¹³¹ haunting that 'resonates with Abraham and Torok's concept of a phantomatic return of what subjects consider shameful and secret events, even when they were not responsible..., or even when they were victims.'¹³² History cannot be ignored or overcome.

'What I says and what I means is two very different things.' – BFG

Intention can only be surmised in the absence of external commentary. It would be remarkable if such implications were lost on Spielberg. Openly rediscovering ethnicity and faith through *Schindler's List*, and founding the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, branded him a public figure.¹³³ In *Minority Report* he cast Tim Blake Nelson (whose character banishes the protagonist into perpetual dreaming); Nelson wrote and directed *The Grey Zone* (USA, 2001), an Auschwitz narrative with an Anne Frank

lookalike in a nightdress, who dies – yet, in cinematic fantasy, has the final word.

Less important than conscious premeditation is cultural significance. Celebrity nevertheless encourages biographical interpretation. The infant Spielberg reputedly learnt numbers from tattoos on visitors' forearms in the family home.¹³⁴ Such discourse – contrary to entertainment showmanship, yet inextricable from *Schindler's List* – is absent from *The BFG's* promotion and reception.

Notwithstanding Rotten Tomatoes' 'Critics Consensus' – '*The BFG* minimizes the darker elements of Roald Dahl's classic'¹³⁵ – it amplifies, with historically specific imagery, the substance of a conversation it excludes: the book's BFG points out, 'Human beans is killing each other much quicker than the giants is doing it'; and 'Giants is not very lovely, but they is not killing each other.' BFG notes that 'human beans is squishing *each other* all the time.... shootling guns and going up in aerioplanes to drop their bombs on each other's heads every week.'¹³⁶ Whether Dahl, or Spielberg, or screenwriter Melissa Mathison is aware, this echoes Frank's adolescent directness: 'Why ... can't people live together peacefully? ... Why is England manufacturing bigger and better aeroplanes and bombs...? Why are millions spent on the war each day ...?'¹³⁷

Spielberg follows Dahl closely. But lack of sustained allegory precludes reading the novel as the film is here. The latter's image systems, allusions, ambiguity about where, when, or why events occur, and CGI

realism that denies pure fantasy yet draws attention as fabrication, create an ominous undertone.¹³⁸

Not just adaptations, all texts are tissues of quotations¹³⁹ Whether Spielberg remembers Keneally likening Nazi headquarters in Poland to ‘the palace of any evil giant,’¹⁴⁰ the connection exists; likewise, when a Jewish girl in *Schindler’s Ark* describes Oskar ‘as a large shape ... somehow not a threatening shape’ – ‘a magical parent.’¹⁴¹ Keneally elsewhere maintains ambiguity concerning ‘the huge, bluff Aryan, Oskar.’¹⁴² Authorship and meanings’ origins have metafictional implications in *The BFG*, film and novel, compounded by slippery, treacherous, or absurd language. Dahl’s BFG, not Sophie, owns *Nicholas Nickleby* – a novel thematically concerning absent parents and truncated childhood. Nevertheless, possessing it helps BFG become literate, not unlike Frank’s father practicing English by reading Dickens within their hideaway¹⁴³, eventually editing and publishing her account. The film’s BFG is the dream mixer, creating comforting fantasies, akin to the reputation of the filmmaker behind DreamWorks; yet Sophie scripts the dream although BFG finally writes the story. In light of Spielberg’s Sophie, in an act of faith, jumping from the balcony, confident BFG will catch her, note that prisoners in *Schindler’s Ark* insist: ‘the most powerful of answers to give to the intending suicide’ is, ‘If you do that, you’ll never know what happened’; ‘you’ll never find out how the plot ends.’¹⁴⁴

Mathison was, unusually, on set daily. Beyond honing Dahl’s dialogue-heavy narration into visual storytelling, this implies production involvement and responsibility for scripted details explicated here. The novel’s BFG

explains Sophie's kidnapping: 'If anyone is ever seeing a giant, he or she must be taken away hipswitch'¹⁴⁵ – meaning immediately, the *Oxford Roald Dahl Dictionary* confirms.¹⁴⁶ The film moves this to when BFG laments losing the previous child unmentioned by Dahl. BFG's pronunciation and fragmented logic conflate the adverb with a proper noun: 'He seed me. Like you did. So I had to take him. Hipswitch. I coulda brought him back home. But then it be too late' – Ipswich being geographically and phonically adjacent to Harwich, where the *kindertransport* landed.

Many associate Spielberg dismissively with fantasy, children's films, and science fiction – formerly 'too lowly a form' for serious contemplation.¹⁴⁷ Yet those genres require wonder and belief to counter incredulity. So does representing the unrepresentable, making Spielberg ideal for *Schindler's List*. His child protagonists are perceptive, resourceful, knowing, wise – hardly innocent, if uncomprehending, as they lead the spectator through a parallel education, or their seeming blindness activates awareness. Childlike perspective for adults involves at least doubly-discoursed address. Spielberg's preoccupation with dreams, hallucinations, and extraordinary states¹⁴⁸ entails formal and metafictional self-reflexivity when BFG constrains the trogglehumper in a perforated sphere. Viewed sideways, it becomes a movie reel. Analogously to how burning film stock in *Inglourious Bastards* destroys Nazi leaders, BFG's metaphorical movie defeats the giants.

As BFG mixes the Queen's dream, zoetrope figures surround him in haze that, figuratively, again makes visible the projector beam. He mixes in small soldiers – allusion to DreamWorks/Amblin's eponymous production (Joe

Dante, USA, 1998) – before adding himself and Sophie. Dialogue affirms her later awakening, but elsewhere from Giant Country; another displacement. She is wearing her nightdress when the Palace sequence starts. Sophie's dream, 'future happiness with children of her own', equates with 'generations' living thanks to Schindler. BFG takes Sophie's extended hand, refiguring the *Schindler's List* poster (Fig. 8).

Here Jameson's consideration of romance as a historically altering genre is apposite. Romance thrives in 'time[s] of troubles,' when 'central authority disappears and marauding bands of robbers and brigands range geographical immensities with impunity.'¹⁴⁹ Its medieval form provided 'imaginary "solution"' to the 'real contradiction' that the enemy was absolutely 'evil,'¹⁵⁰ radically other, yet simultaneously like oneself; a wish-fulfilment whereby, defeated and unmasked, he speaks his name and is forgiven. Comedy, however, another 'wish-fulfilling narrative structure' to which *The BFG* belongs, stages 'not the ethical oppositions and magical forces of' romance, 'its generic opposite, but rather those of the Oedipal situation, with its tyrannical fathers, its rebellious younger generation, and its renewal of the social order by marriage and sexual fulfillment.'¹⁵¹

Equating dreams with narrative, and film with dreams, invites psychoanalysis. The Jungian 'shadow' renders BFG, Dream Country, and the Palace literally 'projections.'¹⁵² Žižek's Lacanian approach¹⁵³ makes Fleshlumper the obscene father and BFG the good father, like Nazism and Schindler, compatibly with comedy's Oedipal aspect that buttresses Sophie's youthful rebellion: 'Future happiness with children of her own' promises the

social order's renewal. 'I believe in BFG' evokes Judaism's *tikkun olam*, or 'healing the world.'¹⁵⁴ More problematically, who is dreaming and where? Characters as textual constructs have no experience to repress, hence no unconscious. A culture has, however. Horror informs every fairy story. The Holocaust overshadows subsequent fantasies. *Schindler's List* haunts later Spielberg projects. In Lacanian terms, stories express desire for the lost Imaginary: Sophie is an orphan; BFG suffers remorse over losing a previous child; the Queen becomes a substitute mother.

With regard to uncertain setting and status, note that Levi, Jean Améry, and others – who for decades recounted memories in futile endeavor to cope with surviving Auschwitz – characterized their traumatized lives as dreamlike.¹⁵⁵ As with Sophie, their suffering originates in literally and figuratively that 'other country.'¹⁵⁶ Such euphemism acknowledges, yet creates distance, in accordance with historian Raul Hilberg's contention: 'Jews were willing to be deceived and deceived themselves, and Jewish denial was a key component in their genocide. Jews even devised and used their own euphemistic language.'¹⁵⁷

Consider cryptonymy's 'inner' and 'outer safe': Sophie imagines herself in an orphanage or a secret annexe within BFG's cave: havens that unravel horrifically into *Nicholas Nickleby* tangled with Anne Frank's present tense uncertainty, dreaded future, yet retrospective inevitability. 'This be where all my dreams is beginning,' BFG says, showing Sophie celestial light on a tree that photosynthesizes life-sustaining fantasies. Their glorious colors contrast with monochrome representing Nazi brutality in *Schindler's List*. This Tree of

Life – another name for the Torah, hence a public symbol of heritage and continuity – additionally sparks a whole Kabbalistic dimension repressed in contemporary Jewish culture: a tradition of ciphers that psychoanalysis inherited. Note, however, that the externalized tree – Sophie’s tree – according to our sophistry, has its cryptonymic counterpart in her safe space, inside a dead tree.

BFG uniquely is nameless: big, friendly, a protective nurturing adult; yet a giant, with monstrous connotations. ‘By including the object,’ Derrida asserts, ‘the process expands the self.... It does not retreat; it advances, propagates itself, assimilates, takes over ... “an enlargement of the Self”¹⁵⁸ – here resulting, arguably, in projection as a giant as much as introjection. Circular windows flanking doorways render both the orphanage and BFG’s lair face-like, reinforcing the setting as inside a head. Lest this seem fanciful, note that Abrams claims of Kubrick’s *The Shining*, ‘The hotel and its grounds are external physical representations of the interior of Jack’s disordered mind and internal world,’ and observes that ‘Gilles Deleuze famously suggests the hotel represented a brain.’¹⁵⁹ BFG rolls away a stone, like a tomb entrance, to enter his hidden dream factory; metempsychosis, a Kabbalistic notion whereby, Abrams explains, ‘lofty souls’ transmigrate ‘to complete spiritual missions’, is called, in Hebrew, *gilgul*, which means ‘to roll’ and ‘forms the same root as that for the Hebrew word for skull (*golgeleth*).’¹⁶⁰ The concretized state of mind, then, resonates with Kertész and Wiesel’s anthropomorphism: human agency recognized behind incomprehensible horror; unbearable implications and ambiguities of that understanding result in shaping the enormous events as a sentient abstraction internalized and

externalized interchangeably as God (whose will, for survivors, renders Him a savior), Death, and a monster.

BFG by burning Sophie's quilt diverts the giants yet potentially obliterates her existence. Nevertheless, she awakens under it, leaving open which dream contains which. Derrida explains: 'The inhabitant of a crypt is always a living dead, a dead entity we are perfectly willing to keep alive, but as dead, one we are willing to keep, as long as we keep it, within us, intact in any way save as living.'¹⁶¹ Recall Levi and others who, liberated, considered themselves living dead¹⁶² yet during incarceration defined themselves defensively against 'faceless' *Muselmänner*,¹⁶³ prisoners who seemingly accepted their fate; or Lanzmann in *Shoah* asking a survivor's family, 'Is he really alive?' Compare BFG at the film's start (Fig. 9) with Elie Wiesel's description of Auschwitz throughout Frank's diary: 'a presence, like a thief in the night, waiting and watching. Hovering.

'Like Death.'¹⁶⁴

'The crypt encloses something or someone' that '[w]ere it buried dead, it would not haunt,' Dragon writes.¹⁶⁵ *The BFG* breaks and simultaneously preserves the silence of unrepresentability, giving form to traumatic memories, "a kind of foreign body" in the psyche.¹⁶⁶

Cryptonymy, Dragon states, reveals the 'train of thought that the text uncannily silences.'¹⁶⁷ Films explicitly presenting dreams bizarrely visualize that familiar abstraction: *Inside Out* (Pete Docter and Ronnie Del Carmen, USA 2015), another (with a strikingly Derridean title) about a girl working

through trauma whose mind contains a Barbie-doll vision of pink freight wagons labelled 'the train of thought'; and *Inception* (Christopher Nolan, USA/UK, 2010), where the protagonist, obsessed with recovering a girl in a red dress, wants to be on a train to somewhere better – before one crashes in, wrecking his meticulously constructed dream. Kubrick's *Lolita* (UK, USA, 1962), Abrams perceives, presents a dialogue almost verbatim from Nabokov; the narrator-villain daydreams about murdering his wife, coded as Jewish:

Charlotte: Darling, you've gone away.

Humbert: Just a minute, darling, I'm following a train of thought.

. . .

Charlotte: Am I on that train?

Humbert: Yes.¹⁶⁸

Haskell observes that in *Fievel Goes West* (Don Bluth, USA, 1991) – a Spielberg-produced children's animation about immigrant mice pursuing the American Dream – a splendidly colorful western train transmogrifies into a dark cattle wagon at night under the influence of malevolent cats.¹⁶⁹ In *The BFG* a locomotive – easily missed in a blink – steams otherwise gratuitously through the mise-en-crypt, ridden by a giant amid dreams released from broken jars.

Conclusion

Wordplay and free association render this explanation, and the elusive, allusive ‘theory of readability’¹⁷⁰ supporting its elucidation, vulnerable to doubt, methodologically and ethically. In clinical psychoanalysis, manifest content is the patient’s verbal account of dreaming. Metonymy, metaphor and, in the multilingual Wolf Man’s case, translation, displace or disguise meanings that dreams evade. But textual analysis traces and connects the critic’s meanings as much as it does signifiers onscreen. Converting Holocaust memory into ingenious puns hazards trivialization yet mastery of signs offers illusory control over referents: Giant Country, inhabited by former ‘gentries’, is a gent’s isle, home of gentiles. Sophie’s projected agency – one remaining, imaginary a/gent of her destiny – is a gent(l)le giant, her Self expanded, her (I)dentify: analogously to expression of the alien, the other, personified in *E.T.*’s E(l)iot). Homophony and homonymy (sometimes multilingual), rhymes, semantic correspondences, and so forth, elicited by verbal reporting, occasion linguistic emphasis difficult to reconcile with ‘trauma’s peculiar visuality as a psychic disorder.’¹⁷¹ Yet description and analysis of audio-visual texts inescapably require words, and movies typically follow verbal scripts and written and spoken instructions and negotiations.

Freud considered the case that originated cryptonymy ‘unbelievable,’ ‘incredible,’¹⁷² expressing ‘incredulity’ the patient reciprocated toward Freud¹⁷³: terms associated with fairy tales and reactions to the Holocaust. Yet what psychoanalysis posits for individuals may replicate culturally:

there is a possibility for undisclosed traumatic secrets to ‘travel’ in the language of the parent to the child. This way, the uncanny symptom formation the particular patient produced may be the result of a previous generation’s repression that formed a crypt in the child’s unconscious.¹⁷⁴

Kaplan states ‘it is hard to separate individual and collective trauma.’¹⁷⁵

Meanings arise not merely in indexical or conventional relationships between signs and referents, or through paradigmatic choices and syntagmatic structuration, or individual responses to trauma, but through effectively infinite entanglements, intertexts, and associations, ‘within which the symbol-thing acts as a mere relay. In other words, *to understand a symbol is to place it back into the dynamism of an intersubjective functioning*.’¹⁷⁶ This accords with Kaplan’s suggestion: although ‘Trauma can never be “healed” ... its pain may be worked through in ... being “translated” via art.’¹⁷⁷ Indeed, ‘the farther war recedes into the past, the more imagination is needed to wrench it into the present.’¹⁷⁸ *The BFG*, like *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word*, ‘stakes out its territory in the space between fantasy and trauma, fiction and reality.’¹⁷⁹ Visual and linguistic paronomasia, rather than substituting for terrible reality, permit its utterance yet perpetuate its problematic need for acknowledgment. Dead metaphors, by definition, once had conscious meaning; newly-forged ones too sometimes need revivification through explication.

In folklore, mountains are giants sleeping. In *The BFG* they literally lie under a grass blanket – as does Auschwitz in *Night and Fog*, that film’s commentary stresses, concerned how time and healing bury memory. The

documentary's penultimate shots show cavernous collapsed roofs, graphically precursing Fleshlumpeater's emergence, particularly as Jean Cayrol's commentary anthropomorphically states: 'War nods, but has one eye open,' and 'There are those who look at these ruins today as though the monster were dead and buried beneath them' (Fig. 10). BFG's chimney, 'a squat, square, widemouthed stack that looked as if it had been brusquely chopped off at its top,' as in Kertész's reminiscence,¹⁸⁰ sits within angular, rocky landscape resembling ruins Cayrol fears are becoming overgrown, obscuring memory. Fantasy has supplanted this central truth. Alternatively, accepting Spielberg's ending at face value, even with the enemy defeated, peace and prosperity regained, dark forces remain, readily resurgent. 'There are ... those who take hope again as the image fades,' *Night and Fog* concludes, 'As though there were a cure for the scourge of these camps. Those who pretend all this happened only once, at a certain time and in a certain place. Those who refuse to look around them, deaf to the endless cry.'

More chilling yet is the trogglehumper. Dahl's BFG implants it in the giants, mischievously, an innocuous nightmare about Jack the Giant Killer that nevertheless makes the kindly hero 'more distressed every moment.'¹⁸¹ Amid spectacle and 'heaps of cinematic sugar,'¹⁸² beyond which ideologeme many fail to look in Spielberg's films, Sophie launches it unilaterally in full knowledge of something different on the label. A remarkable sentiment for a family-oriented children's entertainment, it is laid bare yet swiftly hidden by a conventional, if unconvincing, happy ending. However, BFG has indelibly spoken it aloud: 'Look at what you has done – and there be *no* forgiveness.'

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Illustrations

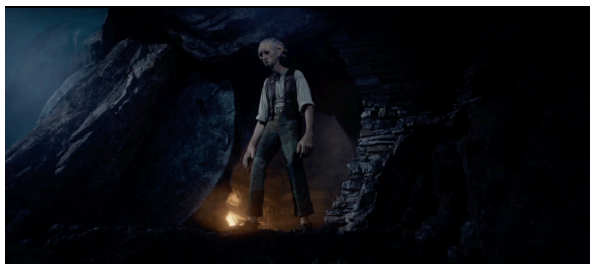


Fig.1: *Left:* BFG in Sophie's dream. *Right:* the mysterious man, later interpreted to be a murderer, in one of the dreams realized by Salvador Dali in *Spellbound*.



Fig. 2: *Left:* Curtain rings tear away as Fleshlumpeater cringes from water in *The BFG*. *Right:* Curtain rings tear away as Marion collapses during the murderous assault in the shower in *Psycho*.



Fig. 3: BFG as the Green Man: symbol of Life and metaphor for hope.



Fig. 4: The judas hole motif. *Left:* 'throbbing veins and burning skin, eyes wild and heavy ... hurried and disordered ... some foul and hideous thing' in *The BFG*. *Right:* Outside the Auschwitz shower room in *Schindler's List*.



Fig. 5: *Left:* A murderous giant tips over shelves containing jars in *The BFG*. *Right:* A murderous camp commandant tips over shelves containing jars in *Schindler's List*.

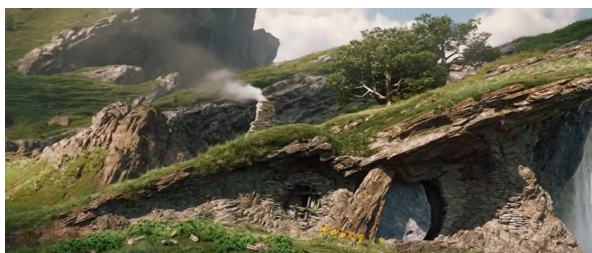


Fig. 6: *Left:* BFG's lair. *Right:* Auschwitz crematorium

(<http://www.drewmanity.com/auschwitz-birkenau-nazi-germany-death-camps-visited/>)

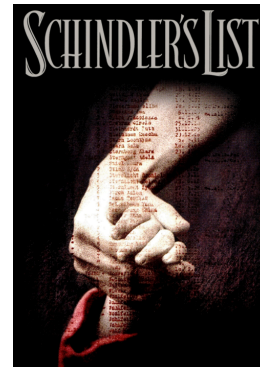


Fig. 7: *Left:* BFG and Sophie. *Right:* Poster for *Schindler's List*, featuring the girl in the red coat – one of the overwhelming majority Schindler could not save.



Fig. 8: BFG as Grim Reaper: symbol of Death and Auschwitz personified.



Fig 9: *Left:* *The BFG*: Fleshlumpeater awakening in Giant Country as symbol of Death and Auschwitz personified. *Right:* *Night and Fog*: collapsed crematorium roof – probably wrecked by departing Nazi forces in unfinished attempt to destroy incriminating evidence.

Notes

¹ Sincere thanks to Tony Richards and anonymous peer reviewers for guidance and suggestions; and Professors Nathan Abrams, Lawrence Baron, Paul Copley, Lester Friedman, I.Q. Hunter, James Kendrick, and Neil Sinyard for commenting on an earlier draft.

² Qtd in F. C. DeCoste, and Bernard Schwartz, eds., *The Holocaust's Ghost: Writing on Art, Politics, Law and Education* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2000), xx.

³ *The BFG* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 2016); Blu-ray: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2016.

⁴ I.Q. Hunter, "Spielberg and Adaptation," in *A Companion to Steven Spielberg*, ed. Nigel Morris (Boston: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 217.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁶ Violet Lucca, *The BFG* review, *Sight and Sound*, August 2016, 72.

⁷ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), x.

⁸ See Nigel Morris, *Empire of Light: The Cinema of Steven Spielberg* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007) and "Magisterial Juvenilia: Amblin' and Spielberg's Early Television Work," in *Companion to Spielberg*, ed. Morris, 61-102.

⁹ Roald Dahl [1982], *The BFG* (London: Puffin, 2013), 105.

¹⁰ Publisher's note, *Ibid.*, 200.

¹¹ The book's inside cover claims Dahl would 'push a bamboo cane through his children's window, pretending to be the Big Friendly Giant!'

¹² David Roche, "Introduction," in *Steven Spielberg: Hollywood Wunderkind and Humanist*, ed. David Roche (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2018), 12.

¹³ Stuart Hall [1973], "Encoding, Decoding," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1999), 508.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 509.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 513-17.

¹⁶ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, xiii.

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- ¹⁷ Nathan Abrams, *Stanley Kubrick: New York Jewish Intellectual* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 13.
- ¹⁸ Siegfried Kracauer [1947], *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, ed. Leonardo Quaresima (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 4.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 5.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 6.
- ²¹ Ibid., 5.
- ²² Tatiana Prorokova, "The Holocaust in Film: Witnessing Extermination Through the Eyes of Children," *Holocaust Studies* 24, 3 (2018): 377-94.
- ²³ Mary Norton, *The Borrowers* (London: Dent, 1952).
- ²⁴ The allusion is to Jonathan Swift [1726], *Gulliver's Travels* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 1992). The hero, gigantic in Lilliput and tiny in Brobdingnag, prefigures how *The BFG* encourages identification with Sophie and her benefactor. Swift's scathing allegory has conventionally been sanitized as children's fantasy.
- ²⁵ Pauline Kael, "The Current Cinema: The Pure and the Impure," *New Yorker*, June 14, 119.
- ²⁶ Thomas Schatz, "Spielberg as Director, Producer, and Movie Mogul," in *Companion to Spielberg*, ed. Morris, 37.
- ²⁷ Franciszek Palowski [1998], *Witness: The Making of Schindler's List*, trans. Anna and Robert G. Ware (London: Orion, 1999), 20.
- ²⁸ Morris, *Cinema of Spielberg*.
- ²⁹ Dahl, *BFG*, 73.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 1.
- ³¹ I.Q. Hunter, *Cult Film as a Guide to Life: Fandom, Adaptation and Identity* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 46.
- ³² Jacques Derrida, "Foreword: Fors: The Anglish Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok," trans. Barbara Johnson, in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), xi.
- ³³ Ibid., xv.

³⁴ Ibid., xvi-xvii.

³⁵ Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938).

³⁶ In accord with our overall argument, E. Anne Kaplan in *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2005) considers melodrama – to which *Rebecca* belongs – ‘a genre that permits women’s multiple identifications with different figures on screen, providing a certain sense of being in control’ (72).

³⁷ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

³⁸ Morris, *Cinema of Spielberg*, 236-37.

³⁹ Hunter, “Spielberg and Adaptation,” 221. Sophie’s kidnapping, forcibly hammocked in her quilt, strikingly resembles how Olek and Henry Rosner survived a long journey to Auschwitz thanks to an adult prisoner ‘suspend[ing] them in their blankets from horse hooks’ above crammed freight car passengers: Thomas Keneally, *Schindler’s Ark* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), 355.

⁴⁰ Anne Thompson [1994], “How Steven Spielberg Brought *Schindler’s List* to Life,” in *Oskar Schindler and his List: The Man, the Book, the Film, the Holocaust and its Survivors*, ed. Thomas Fensch (N. Chesterfield, Va: New Century Books, 2014), 74.

⁴¹ Laurence A. Rickels, *The Psycho Records* (Chichester: Wallflower Press, 2016), 1.

⁴² Ibid., 3.

⁴³ Dahl, *BFG*, 30.

⁴⁴ Lucca, *BFG* review, 72.

⁴⁵ Hugh Ash, “Roald Dahl: Rabid Jew-hater and charmer of children,” *Jerusalem Post*, September 15, 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Blogs/Postcard-from-Mallorca/Roald-Dahl-rabid-Jew-hater-and-charmer-of-children-467760>; BBC News Wales, “Roald Dahl: ‘Don’t ignore anti-Semitism in centenary’,” September 18, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-37400468>; Maya Oppenheim, “Roald Dahl after 100 years: Remembering beloved author’s forgotten antisemitic past.” *Independent*, September 13, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/roald-dahl-antisemitic-100-years-remembering-author-forgotten-past-a7254266.html>

⁴⁶ Nathan Abrams, email to authors, August 5, 2017.

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- ⁴⁷ D. H. Lawrence [1923], *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 8.
- ⁴⁸ Lawrence L. Langer, "The Way It Was," in *Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology*, ed. Lawrence L. Langer (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 11.
- ⁴⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, "The Holocaust's Life as Ghost," in *Social Theory After the Holocaust*, ed. Robert Fine and Charles Turner (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2000), 12.
- ⁵⁰ James Watson, "Auschwitz and the Limits of Transcendence." *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 18, 2 (1992), 164.
- ⁵¹ David Cesarani, *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-49* (London: Macmillan, 2016), xxv.
- ⁵² Jankiel Wiernik, "One Year in Treblinka," in *Art from the Ashes*, ed. Langer 33.
- ⁵³ Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler, How History is Brought, Packaged, and Sold* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1999), 4.
- ⁵⁴ Aaron Kerner, *Film and the Holocaust: New Perspectives on Dramas, Documentaries and Experimental Films* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 3.
- ⁵⁵ Ethan Mordden, "Books: Kat and Maus," *The New Yorker*, April 6, 1992, 91.
- ⁵⁶ Kerner, *Film and the Holocaust*, 133.
- ⁵⁷ Prorokova, "Holocaust in Film," 377.
- ⁵⁸ Yvonne Kozlovsky Golan, "'Au revoir, les enfants': The Jewish Child as a Microcosm of the Holocaust as Seen in World Cinema" *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 30, 1 (2011): 54.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 61.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² Golan, "Au revoir," 6.
- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 8.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Palowski, *Witness*, 172.

⁶⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1977), 166.

⁶⁸ A pedant might notice Portcullis House, completed 2001, along with covered scaffolding on the Palace of Westminster, in place when the film was made. While these apparent ‘bloopers’ presumably arise from location footage incorporated into CGI, they reinforce the indefinite time setting important to our reading.

⁶⁹ William Styron [1979], *Sophie’s Choice* (London: Vintage, 2014), 567.

⁷⁰ Thomas Keneally, *Searching for Schindler* (London: Sceptre, 2008), 214.

⁷¹ Judith Kerr, *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (London: Collins, 1968).

⁷² Lucy Wallis, “Judith Kerr and the Story behind *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*,” *BBC News Magazine*, November 2013, 26, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-25027090>.

⁷³ Phyllida Scrivens, *Escaping Hitler: A Jewish Boy’s Quest for Freedom and His Future* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2016), 22.

⁷⁴ Anne Frank [1947/1952], *The Diary of a Young Girl*, ed. Otto H. Frank and Mirjam Pressler, trans. Susan Massotty (London: Penguin, 1997), 167.

⁷⁵ Imre Kertész [1975], *Fateless [Fatelessness]*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (London: Vintage, 2006), 157.

⁷⁶ Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1997), 8.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷⁹ Morris, *Cinema of Spielberg*.

⁸⁰ George Gomori, “Imre Kertész obituary: Holocaust survivor who won the Nobel prize for literature,” *The Guardian* (London), Thursday March 31, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/31/imre-kertesz-obituary>.

⁸¹ Abrams, *Kubrick*, 9.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸³ Keneally, *Schindler’s Ark*, 129; 130; 323.

⁸⁴ Frank, *Diary*, 54.

⁸⁵ Art Spiegelman [1973, 1980-1991], *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (London: Penguin, 2003).

⁸⁶ Kerner, *Film and the Holocaust*, 37; 36.

⁸⁷ Kitty Hart-Moxon, *Return to Auschwitz* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1981), 81.

⁸⁸ Dahl, *BFG*, 125; 136.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁰ Frank, *Diary*, 57.

⁹¹ Kaplan, *Trauma*, 3.

⁹² Wiesenthal, *Sunflower*, 35.

⁹³ Golan, "Au revoir," 10.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹⁵ Tony Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda and Consensus* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

⁹⁶ Alex Bein, *The Jewish Question: Biography of a World Problem* (Toronto: Associated UP, 1990), 400.

⁹⁷ Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 181; *Searching*, 126.

⁹⁸ Fensch, *Oskar Schindler*, 173.

⁹⁹ Frank, *Diary*, 83; 117; 116; 179; 238; 309.

¹⁰⁰ Dahl, *BFG*, 102.

¹⁰¹ Joshua D. Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015).

¹⁰² Edward Lewis Wallant, *The Pawnbroker* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and World, 1961).

¹⁰³ Yana Volavkova (ed.) *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* (New York: Random House, 1995).

¹⁰⁴ Wiesenthal, *Sunflower*, 14-15.

¹⁰⁵ Nathan Abrams, "A Jewish American Monster: Stanley Kubrick, Anti-Semitism and *Lolita* (1962)," *Journal of American Studies* 49, no. 3 (2014): 2.

¹⁰⁶ Vladimir Nabokov [1955], *The Annotated Lolita: Revised and Updated*, ed. Alfred Appel Jr. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1993), 314.

¹⁰⁷ Wiesenthal, *Sunflower*, 46.

¹⁰⁸ Qtd by Schnabel (1958) in Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *The End of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2011), 116.

¹⁰⁹ Frank, *Diary*, 6.

¹¹⁰ Qtd by Rosenfeld, *End of Holocaust*, 95.

¹¹¹ Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2013).

¹¹² Frank, *Diary*, 38; 157; 175; 249; 260; 271; 290.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 268.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹¹⁵ Jason Vest, "Minority Report review," *Film and History*, 32, 2 (2002): 108-09.

¹¹⁶ Spielberg repeatedly demonstrates fascination with film's fantastic status. An early television episode, *The Name of the Game*: "L.A. 2017" (NBC, 1971), a future dystopia with allusions to its own illusionism, turns out to be a dream. *The Color Purple* (USA, 1985) and *Empire of the Sun* (USA, 1987) envisage protagonists' sustaining daydreams; subjective experience and diegetic reality frequently blur. (The latter protagonist wonders whether God is our dream or we His.) *Always* (USA, 1989) is interpretable as Dorinda's dream (Morris, *Cinema of Spielberg*, 2007, 166). *Hook*, Spielberg's *Peter Pan*, is an Oedipal fantasy, setting Neverland against adult responsibility. *Catch Me if You Can* (USA, 2002) follows Frank and his father's elaborate self-delusions in pursuing the evasive American Dream. *Lincoln* (USA, 2012) presents the President's dream of hurtling alone into an unknown future. *Ready Player One* (USA, 2018) presents computer-game virtual reality worlds-within-worlds within its framing diegesis.

¹¹⁷ Frank, *Diary*, 277-78.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 325.

¹¹⁹ Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 631; 627.

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- ¹²⁰ Cara de Silva, ed., *In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezin* (Lanham: Jason Aronson, 1996), 52.
- ¹²¹ Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 308; 309.
- ¹²² Prorokova, "Holocaust in Film," 381.
- ¹²³ *Ibid.*, 380.
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 382.
- ¹²⁵ Daniel Feldman, "Reading Games in Auschwitz: Play in Holocaust Youth Literature," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 38, 3 (2014): 362-3.
- ¹²⁶ Jen Baker, "Betwixt-and-Between: Reclaiming Childhood in *Hook*," in *Children in the Films of Steven Spielberg*, ed. Adrian Schober and Debbie C. Olson (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), 163.
- ¹²⁷ Frank, *Diary*, 330.
- ¹²⁸ Spiegelman, *Maus*, 296.
- ¹²⁹ Dahl, *BFG*, 109.
- ¹³⁰ Martin Kitchen, *Speer: Hitler's Architect* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2015), 408. The poem that suggested the title *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, by a Terezin internee and subsequent Auschwitz victim, contains the line, 'The dandelions call to me': Pavel Friedmann (1942) in Volavkova. Dandelions, which grow extensively at Auschwitz, appear to be accruing symbolic status akin to poppies at First World War battlefields.
- ¹³¹ Ilan Avisar, "Holocaust Movies and the Politics of Collective Memory," in *Thinking About the Holocaust: After Half a Century*, ed. Alvin H. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997), 51.
- ¹³² Kaplan, *Trauma*, 124.
- ¹³³ James Russell, "Producing the Spielberg 'Brand'," in *Companion to Spielberg*, ed. Morris, 45-57.
- ¹³⁴ Palowski, *Witness*, 170.
- ¹³⁵ "The BFG," *Rotten Tomatoes* (2016), Accessed June 3, 2017. https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_bfg_2016/.
- ¹³⁶ Dahl, *BFG*, 70-71.
- ¹³⁷ Frank, *Diary*, 278.

¹³⁸ Kaplan reads *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren, Alexander Hammid, USA 1943) similarly to how *The BFG* is understood here:

a visual correlative to the subjective, emotional, and visual experience of trauma, leaving the situation uncertain or to be deduced by the viewer. That is, the entire world of her film is 'inside' the traumatic experience, with its visual distortions, its hallucinatory repetitions of actions, its terrifying disassociations and splittings, its uncanny intertwining of inside and outside, and its crossing of borders normally held firm in ordinary life. (*Trauma*, 125)

¹³⁹ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text: Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath* (London: Fontana Press, 1977).

¹⁴⁰ Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 2.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 199; 200.

¹⁴² Ibid., 77.

¹⁴³ Frank, *Diary*, 295.

¹⁴⁴ Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, 321.

¹⁴⁵ Dahl, *BFG*, 23.

¹⁴⁶ Susan Rennie, *Oxford Roald Dahl Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016).

¹⁴⁷ Roger Luckhurst, "Other-worldly wise," *Times Higher Education*, May 12, 2011.

¹⁴⁸ Henry Sheehan, "The Panning of Steven Spielberg," *Film Comment*, May-June (1992): 54-60; July-August (1992): 66-71.

¹⁴⁹ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 104-5.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 105.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 128-129.

¹⁵² Christopher Hauke and Ian Alister, eds, *Jung & Film: Post Jungian Takes on the Moving Image* (Hove: Brunner-Routledge, 2001), 1-2; 246.

¹⁵³ Slavoj Zizek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁵⁴ Abrams, *Kubrick*, 11.

¹⁵⁵ Rosenfeld, *End of Holocaust*, 2011.

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- ¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 165.
- ¹⁵⁷ Abrams, *Kubrick*, 109.
- ¹⁵⁸ Derrida, "Foreword," xvi.
- ¹⁵⁹ Abrams, *Kubrick*, 195.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 139.
- ¹⁶¹ Derrida, "Foreword," xxi.
- ¹⁶² Rosenfeld, *End of Holocaust*, 190.
- ¹⁶³ Primo Levi [1958; 1963], *If This is a Man* and *The Truce*, trans. Stuart Woolf (London: Abacus, 1987): 96.
- ¹⁶⁴ Elie Wiesel, "Introduction," trans. Euan Cameron, in Frank, *Diary*, viii.
- ¹⁶⁵ Zoltán Dragon, "Derrida's Specter; Abraham's Phantom Psychoanalysis as the Uncanny Kernel of Deconstruction," *The AnaChronisT* 11 (2005): 260.
- ¹⁶⁶ Kaplan, *Trauma*, 26.
- ¹⁶⁷ Dragon, "Derrida's Specter," 254.
- ¹⁶⁸ Adapted from Nabokov, *Lolita*, 85; Abrams, "Jewish American Monster," 552
- ¹⁶⁹ Molly Haskell, *Steven Spielberg: A Life in Films* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2017), 21.
- ¹⁷⁰ Nicholas Rand, "Translator's Introduction: Toward a Cryptonymy of Literature," in Abraham and Torok, *Wolf Man's*, li.
- ¹⁷¹ Kaplan, *Trauma*, 13.
- ¹⁷² Derrida, "Foreword," n.14, 118.
- ¹⁷³ Abraham and Torok, *Wolf Man's*, 65.
- ¹⁷⁴ Dragon, "Derrida's Specter," 264.
- ¹⁷⁵ Kaplan, *Trauma*, 1.
- ¹⁷⁶ Derrida, "Foreword," xxix.
- ¹⁷⁷ Kaplan, *Trauma*, 19.

¹⁷⁸ Caryn James, "Putting the Unimaginable to Imaginative Use," *The New York Times*, March 1, 1992, 2:1, 14.

¹⁷⁹ Rand, "Translator's Introduction," lvi.

¹⁸⁰ Kertész, *Fateless*, 108.

¹⁸¹ Dahl, *BFG*, 76.

¹⁸² Lucca, *BFG* review, 72.